

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

July 3, 2003

Dear Representative Markey:

Thank you for your letter on the need to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC).

Reducing the threat to the United States, our friends and our allies by weapons of mass destruction, including biological weapons, is a top priority of the Administration. At the Fifth Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) in 2002, the States Parties agreed to a 3-year work program focused on practical measures to address this threat. The topics chosen are drawn largely from the President's proposals of November 2001.

Under the agreed work program, the BWC States Parties will hold annual meetings in 2003-2005 on specific subjects, preceded by two-week experts meetings. We are actively preparing for the 2003 meetings which will address national implementation measures and security of pathogens and toxins. We have circulated papers to all Parties outlining our national efforts and proposing specific approaches for the 2003 topics. We have also consulted with allies and with representatives from relevant intergovernmental organizations. We are pleased with the positive response to the U.S. approach thus far.

With respect to biosecurity, we believe BWC States Parties should support and would benefit from efforts by the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and the Office Internationale des Epizooties to expand biosecurity guidelines. We are also encouraging States Parties to outline their efforts to establish national biosecurity measures.

With respect to implementation measures, the United States has set a leading example with the adoption of a comprehensive set of national laws, including penal legislation. We have recommended that the 2003 experts meetings compile lists of basic elements of national measures, and of contacts, including national government legal experts who could assist individual States Parties in establishing national implementation measures. We are prepared to offer assistance to States Parties in devising and adopting such measures.

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We have taken note of the efforts of individuals and nongovernmental organizations to study national laws. However, we believe it would be disruptive of the multilateral BWC effort in this area for the U.S. Government to duplicate that work unilaterally. In addition, any effort to develop a prescriptive norm for national implementation measures would go beyond the BWC work program and distract State Parties from undertaking concrete national steps now.

The Administration appreciates your interest in these important matters.

Sincerely,



Condoleezza Rice
Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs

The Honorable Edward J. Markey
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